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ABSTRACT

A course in the basic principles of journalism is presented. The principles are studied as applied to writing columns, reviews, feature stories, human interest articles, fashion reporting, comics, personality interviews, and other types of entertaining writing for the newspaper. Course objectives include: (1) The student will identify feature stories; (2) The student will defend or criticize a story; (3) The student will write a daily column for a specified number of days; and (4) The student will suggest topics for informative or news features, or human interest stories based on school life. (Author/CK)

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AUTHORIZED COURSE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THE QUINMESTER PROGRAM

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Language Arts: CREATIVE JOURNALISM 5113.70
5114.128
5115.144
5116.147
5164.04

English, Journalism

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Written by Marlene E. Adams
for the
DIVISION OF INSTRUCTION
Dade County Public Schools
Miami, Florida
1971

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Course Number

COURSE TITLE: Creative Journalism

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: Basic principles of journalism will be applied to writing columns, reviews, feature stories, human interest articles, fashion reporting, comics, personality interviews, and other types of entertaining writing for the newspaper. Essential to those interested in newspaper staff.

I. Performance Objectives

A. Given a newspaper or a number of newspaper stories, the student will identify the feature stories.

B. Given a feature story, the student will explain why it is a feature story by identifying the feature characteristics of the story.

C. Given a number of feature stories, the student will classify each according to type of feature that is is.

D. The student will suggest reasons for the inclusion of entertaining articles in a newspaper.

E. Given a feature story, the student will defend or criticize story and its possible inclusion in the newspaper.

F. The student will write a personality interview based on the information he has gathered.

G. Given a time limit of several days, the student will write a daily column for those days.

H. Given a book, record, or opportunity to see a film or play, the student will write a review based on it.

I. The student will suggest topics for informative or news features, or human interest stories based on school life.

J. Given the opportunity the student will write an informative or news feature or human interest story.

K. Given the opportunity, the student will prepare a comic strip, cartoon, contest, or other "miscellaneous" feature item for the school newspaper.

II. Course Content

A. Rationale

The functions of a newspaper include not only informing and influencing the reader, but entertaining him as well, A great proportion of a newspaper's content is devoted to non-news items such as features, human interest stories, columns, interviews, and the like. The popularity of these items often accounts for increased circulation and revenue for the newspaper. Skill in recognizing and writing these entertaining stories is useful to any journalist, and requires development of special skills and attitudes.

B. Introductory material

Creative Journalism will identify the characteristics of creative journalistic stories and features; will define the role of such materials in the newspaper; will offer wide reading in the various types of features; and will provide practice in writing many of these types of stories for the school newspaper.

C. Range of Subject Matter

1. Definition or identification of the feature in a newspaper

In order to identify features, other types of newspaper stories must be identified as well -- news stories and editorials particularly. The ways by which a feature is identified -- by its subject matter, its writing style, its location in the newspaper, and so on -- should be stressed, and contrasted with the other types of journalistic writing.

2. Purpose of the feature story

If a newspaper informs, influences, and entertains, then the feature story is justified and necessary, because it entertains, and often conveys information at the same time. How much of a newspaper's linage should be devoted to feature items? A study of local school and city newspapers will reveal the proportion of such stories to the rest of the newspaper's content.

3. Types of feature stories

There are so many items in a newspaper that can be classified under the broad heading of features that it is often easier to determine that a story is a feature if it is not a news story or an editorial. But in further classifying features, one can observe certain predominant types of articles. The most common types of features are:

a. News features -- feature stories based on a recent news event which have more entertaining than informative characteristics. These are often front-page stories written with a punch-line format in an informal style. Human interest stories are in this category. They evoke an emotional response such as smiles, tears, or feelings of indignation.

b. Personality sketches and interviews -- features based on the attitudes and/or accomplishments of an individual. The person featured in the story may be famous, popular, or little-known.

c. Columns -- signed articles which occur regularly in the same location in a newspaper. Often such columns are written from the first-person-singular point of view, a characteristic of no other newspaper article type. Often written by an "expert" and dealing with a limited or specialized area of interest, columns can be factual or opinionated and serious or humorous. Columns often feature political viewpoints, sports opinions, social or medical advice, personal experiences, how-to-do-it information, little-known facts or gossip, or man-on-the-street interviews. A newspaper often carries columns by writers who disagree with its general editorial viewpoint, in order to show other sides to an issue.

d. Informative features -- articles of a timely or a timeless nature giving information on fashion, food, sports rules, historical events or places, travel, and many other subjects.

e. Reviews -- interpretative articles on drama, films, books, art, phonograph records, musical or dance performances, and so on. These features when signed often contain the writer's informed evaluations, but such opinions are not essential to the review and are generally omitted by writers who are not experts in the area or form being reviewed.

III. Teaching Strategies

A. Projects

The teacher may wish to assign long-range projects which allow students to specialize in one type of feature writing. Such projects might include a study of that type of writing in local

school and/or city newspapers, or an extensive writing assignment such as writing a series of related features or a continuous column or comic strip. Another project might be to assign individual students to study a particular columnist in a local newspaper, to interview him if possible, and to report to the class on various aspects of their findings, such as the identification of writing style characteristics, his subject matter, his sources of ideas, his tone, his intended audience.

B. Writing assignments

Since this is primarily a writing course, there will be many different writing assignments. In addition to the obvious necessity for the students to write feature stories of the various types, additional assignments might include brief analyses of certain features in a newspaper, or a thoughtful essay on the role of the feature in the newspaper. In addition, students might be assigned to compose a list of titles for possible feature stories and to explain how a writer would prepare himself to compose such stories, anticipating the needed research and interviews.

C. Discussions

The technique of discussion is useful in studying many aspects of this course. Some of these areas are:

1. identifying feature stories in a newspaper
2. evaluating student-written features
3. determining characteristics of style and tone in features
4. evaluating the importance of feature stories in a newspaper
5. determining appropriate topics for writing features

D. Short lectures

The teacher may find the lecture technique helpful in reviewing the types of stories in a newspaper, in listing characteristics of a column, and in conveying statistical information about the relationship between newspaper content and circulation or revenue.

E. Resource personnel

It is informative to hear a newspaper columnist or feature writer explaining his work on a city newspaper. Other possible

guests might be the editor of the school newspaper or magazine, who could explain the needs of his publication for entertaining articles. In addition, it is excellent practice for a class to interview an accomplished student, teacher, or community leader in order to write a personality sketch. A member of the class might be an appropriate individual to interview for practice in this technique.

F. Field trips

Visiting local places of interest or attending a theatrical performance as a class group provides opportunities for all students to write features and to compare results. A trip to the local newspaper, if it can be arranged, would be informative if feature writers could speak to the class and show them the conditions under which they work.

IV. Learning Activities for Students

A. Identifying feature stories

1. Read textbook chapters on features and columns.

2. Read a number of stories identified as features.

3. Read and compare news stories, editorials, and features on similar topics.

4. Convert a news story to a feature by changing tone and emphasis.

5. Hear a lecture on characteristics of feature stories.

6. Determine in class discussion whether a story is a feature or not by looking for feature characteristics.

B. Evaluating feature stories

1. In class, discuss readership and audience to determine needs and interests of readers.

2. Read several features and choose the one which the class believes would be a) most widely read by students, b) of greatest importance or significance to students, and c) most entertaining to students.

3. Suggest ways in which features in the school paper could have been improved.

4. Determine proportion of features to news and editorial articles in a) city papers, b) local weeklies, and c) school papers from own school and other schools.

5. Debate in class whether the school paper should carry more or fewer features, or the same number.

C. Writing feature stories

1. Interviews

a. Hear a lecture on effective interviewing techniques.

b. Conduct interviews in class and then draw up a list of effective interviewing techniques.

c. Prepare a list of questions to be asked of a possible individual who is to be interviewed, and compare the questions in class.

d. Allow small groups to interview the same individual at different times. Instruct the individual to answer questions asked but not to volunteer information. Compare information. Compare information and quotations gathered by different groups.

e. Interview a person (assigned to or selected by the student). Write up an interview story, and turn in notes taken at interview as well.

2. Columns

a. In a city paper, identify all columns and determine the distinguishing characteristics of columns.

b. Read a particular columnist for several days and tell class about the content, style, and potential audience of that column.

c. List ideas for possible columns in the school paper.

d. Establish a point-of-view and a subject area, and write a column for three to five days in a row.

e. Read student-written columns aloud daily, or after series is complete. Comment on its possible success in the paper, its style, its consistency, its authority and information, etc.

f. Invite a columnist to speak to class on the problems and methods of column writing.

3. Reviews

a. Read reviews of books, records, art, and musical or dramatic performances in the newspaper. Distinguish between fact and opinion in every sentence.

b. Determine qualifications needed to be a critical reviewer by discussion in class.

c. As a class, in small groups, or individually, attend a movie, play, concert, or other performance. Write a review.

d. As a class, in small groups, or individually, read a book, hear a record, or visit an art show. Write a review.

e. Watch a TV program and review it in class the next day.

f. Compare reviews written by different students on the same topic for content, facts, opinions, and evaluative remarks, and so on.

4. News features and human interest stories

a. Distinguish between features and news stories by contrasting a) order in which events are revealed, b) purpose, and c) tone or style.

b. Read news stories to find human-interest angles which the reporter did not recognize or emphasize.

c. Rewrite a news story as a feature or human interest story.

List topics for possible human interest stories and features.

e. Stage an event in class or describe a situation to class. Write stories based on event or situation, and compare stories.

Informative feature stories

a. Visit a local place of interest as a class, small group,

or individually, and write a story for the paper about the place -- its appearance, historical background, and so on.

b. Explain a hobby or skill in an informative feature.

c. Write an entertaining and informative feature on how to write a feature story.

d. Select a holiday or tradition, and do research necessary to write a story about it. Write a feature which reveals information most readers do not know about the subject.

e. Read informative features in a newspaper. Look for a) presence or absence of humor, b) evidence of opinion, c) clear organization, and d) verbal or graphic illustrations. Then discuss the value of the story to readers.

6. Miscellaneous features

a. Identify all of the "miscellaneous" features in a newspaper. These will include puzzles, comics, contests, and other entertaining items which cannot be classified as "stories."

b. Discuss or debate the value and appeal of each of the miscellaneous features identified in (a).

c. As a class, list ideas for various miscellaneous feature items. Discuss advantages and disadvantages of each. (For instance, contests might be popular but would require judges, prizes, a place of collection for entries.)

d. Devise a contest for the school paper. Describe the entries which would be acceptable. Explain how the contest would be judged, what would be a suitable prize, how to announce winners, and what the advantage of such a contest would be to the paper.

e. Compose a puzzle or quiz for the school paper. Include the answers. Explain reasons why this would be a popular item with readers.

f. Create a comic strip or cartoon feature and draw at least five installments of it. (Use black ink on white paper). Explain purpose and appeal of your feature.

V. Student Resources

A. State-adopted Textbooks

1. Hartman, William. Journalism. River Forest, Illinois: Laidlaw Brothers: 1968.

Chapter 1. 6 explains development of the feature story historically.
Chapter 2. 3 explains the entertainment function of a newspaper.
Chapter 12. 1 identifies and explains types of features.
Chapter 12. 2 identifies and explains types of columns.

2. Mulligan, John and D'Amelio, Dan. Experiences in Journalism. Atlanta: Lyons and Carnahan, Inc.: 1966.

Chapter 7 defines features, explains human interest approach, and classifies features.
Chapter 10 explains columns and column writing.

B. Reference Materials

1. Reader's Digest Magazine

2. Columbia Press Review: New York: Columbia Scholastic Press Assn. (magazine)

VI. Teacher Resources

A. State-adopted Textbooks (see above)

B. Books

1. Adams, Julian and Stratton, Kenneth. Press Time. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentiss-Hall, Inc.: 1963.

Chapter 9 explains types of news features and discusses the entertainment function for these stories.
Chapter 10 gives techniques for interviewing and writing personality interview stories.
Chapter 11 defines columns, gives criteria for evaluating columns and suggests types of columns to write.

2. Agnew, J. Kenner. Today's Journalism for Today's Schools. Syracuse, New York: L. W. Singer Company: 1960.

Section 3 covers all aspects of feature writing.
Section 4.1 discusses interviewing techniques.

3. Allnut, Benjamin. Springboard to Journalism. New York. Columbia Scholastic Press Association.

Chapter 4 categorizes features, discusses feature writing style, and includes columns and interviews.
Chapter 7 is devoted to interviewing techniniques.

4. English, Earl and Hach, Clarence. Scholastic Journalism. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press: 1968.

Chapter 8 covers interviewing techniques and the writing of interview stories.
Chapter 11 defines human interest stories and explains writing style for human interest articles.
Chapter 12 covers all aspects of feature writing.

5. Hohenberg, John. The Professional Journalist. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 1969.

Chapter 14 explains human interest and news features.
Chapter 27 identifies special interest areas in newspaper writing and (under "cultural story") distinguishes between review and criticism techniques.

6. Spears, Harold. High School Journalism. New York: Macmillan Company: 1956.

Chapter 7 discusses interview techniques.
Chapter 10 defines and categorizes feature stories.
Chapter 11 explains reviews.
Chapter 12 deals with column writing.

C. Films

1. Style in Writing. Indiana University, 30 min. B&W.